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LEGENDS. By Amy Lowell. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Miss Lowell makes in her Preface the most pregnant of comments upon her own book. A Legend is something which nobody has written and everybody has written, and which anybody is at liberty to rewrite; wherefore she cares nothing about the inaccuracies—from the point of view of the student of folk-lore—which have crept into her poems, because the truth of poetry is imaginative, not literal. In all that we most cordially agree with her, in relation to the present work. But since this is so significantly and pertinently true concerning the poetry of legends, we cannot escape wondering that Miss Lowell has not always perceived the equal truth of the converse, or perhaps of a corollary, when applied to what we may call the poetry of history.

The poet should be free to exercise any flight, vagary or eccentricity of imagination or of invention in writing legends, because legends are essentially products of imagination and invention. But incidents and narratives of history are not imaginary, but literal; wherefore in enshrining them in poetic structures we should always so far adhere to the spirit of the facts that, no matter how opulently adorned with the embroidery of imagination, the finished poem shall produce an effect in harmony with that of the most prosaic and dry-as-dust annals. This can always be done without in any degree hampering the poet or sacrificing the fanciful charm of the work, for the reason that historic truth must always be as fertile soil and as fecund a source of inspiration for imaginative enlargement as historic untruth. Of this a striking exemplification was afforded in a former volume of Miss Lowell's. Among its contents are two historic poems, side by side; of which one produces upon the mind of the reader an impression exactly accordant with the known facts of history, and the other an impression as exactly discordant. Yet in amplitude and variety of the exercise of creative imagination, the former is if possible superior to the latter.

All this is, however, by the way for the present, since the volume before us comprises nothing but Legends in the truest sense of the word. Every one of them is sheer invention, and of every one of them the inventor has from time immemorial been unknown. Doubtful is it, in fact, if one of them ever had an individual inventor, author, composer. Rather should we say that they "out from the heart of Nature rolled," and they are no more to be strait-jacketed in a single fixed form than the sunrise or sunset sky is to be confined to a single fixed color scheme. The epigram of Kipling on Tribal Lays is apt and accurate. No matter in how many different ways one of these Legends may be repeated, they are all right ways, so long as they are instinct with the essential spirit of legendry. And that spirit is assuredly not lacking in any of these vibrant, scintillating and heart-haunting versions. Miss Lowell has, as she admits,—or boasts,—changed, added, subtracted, jumbled at will, made over to suit her own poetic vision. But always she has done so in the intrinsically legendary vein, and the result is so enthralling, so enchanting,

that we are quite sure that her version is the best possible version and is the very one in which the legend was from the beginning of time intended to be told.

When from the matter of the Legends we turn to the dress in which Miss Lowell has clothed them, we are inclined to felicitate many other poets upon her insistence in pursuing her own unique and self-ruled way. For here is convincing evidence that if she had chosen to adhere to any of the more familiar and conventional mediums of poetical expression, she would have so greatly excelled that among many of her competitors there would have been "no second." Thus in "The Ring and the Castle" we have the very perfection of ballad-making, and again in "Dried Majoram," though in an entirely different rhythm; as both are entirely different from the accepted and traditional "ballad measure." Again, in "From a Yucca to a Passion Vine" there are passages so purely lyrical that they sing themselves, whether the reader wills or no. In the colossal "Many Swans" we find all things, lyrical, dramatic, narrative, descriptive; as many and as varied notes as in a Beethoven symphony, and all as harmonious and as integral.

Those, if those there be, who assume Miss Lowell's poems always to be devoid of rhyme and rhythm, will be informed otherwise by finding here sustained passages of marvellous beauty in which the versification is as regular, the rhythm as uniform, the rhymes as carefully chosen, as in any poem of Tennyson's or Poe's. True, we do find "hero" made to rhyme with "must know," and "lustres" with "dust blurs"; but we should not have to search far to discover more flagrant examples in the masters of rhyme whom we have mentioned. We may with Horace be indignant "*quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*," though if we are we shall be unreasonable and shall risk spoiling our sweet dispositions. Personally, we have always wondered why Tennyson went to the trouble of composing his famous "A Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman," in the competition for the most hopelessly commonplace and wooden line, when he could have done as well by quoting a line from Poe's "Raven," or from "The Warden of the Cinque Ports" of Poe's *bête noir*, Longfellow.

But—and this is the supreme merit and charm—whenever Miss Lowell does thus employ regular forms, rhythm and rhyme, we are invariably made to feel that she does so not because she is compelled but because she freely elects so to do, and that she thus elects solely because such forms happen to be in her taste and judgment the best suited to the themes. If it would have served the themes better, she would unhesitatingly have employed "free verse" or blank verse or "polyphonic prose" or what not. So these meticulously versified, rhythmical and rhyming ballads and lyrics are after all as truly "free" as any other form of poetical expression. They were not imposed upon the writer, but were taken by her, of her own free will, simply because they suited her purpose better than any other. This, we repeat, is the supreme fascination of these poems; that they always seem absolutely free, spontaneous, sincere. They are not exempt from faults, and sometimes these are grievous.

But the damning faults of affectation, and of eccentricity just for eccentricity's sake, which are characteristic of the major portion of current "free verse," are never found in the poems of Amy Lowell.

THE SALVAGING OF CIVILIZATION. By H. G. Wells. New York: the Macmillan Company.

A kind of intellectual knight-errantry upon the part of Mr. Wells—a willingness to attack the most monstrous and savage problems with the weapons of idealism—is no small part of this writer's undeniable appeal. It requires some boldness, one must remember, to advance constructive ideas. Only a venturesome, as well as a disinterested thinker could have written a book like *The Salvaging of Civilization*, and the adventure itself, considering the courage, the high motives, and the intellectual address displayed in it, wins applause. It must be said, however, that Mr. Wells, like Sir Launcelot, does not quite arrive.

Civilization, thinks Mr. Wells, is liable shortly to collapse and the human race to decay unless some way can be found to prevent wars—for into further wars the world is aimlessly drifting; the next great convulsion will be more horrible than the one just passed, and civilization will be unable to withstand the strain. To avert this disaster, the author offers three suggestions—two of which are original.

With that perspicacity which he never fails to manifest in some part of every book that he writes Mr. Wells perceives that the present League of Nations—and, indeed, the league of nations *idea*—is amateurish and insufficient. In words that could not be bettered he points out that the League is "at once, a little too much for American participation and not sufficient for the urgent needs of Europe." What is needed is not something less than the League, but something far greater—a true World State. The proposition is a big one, for the abolition of war means no mere readjustment of human relations, but a change of human nature—war is as much an integral and shaping influence in our present civilization as is religion or law. We ought not, therefore, to underrate the magnitude of the undertaking, but we should realize that because of this very magnitude a heroic remedy is required.

It at once occurs to the reader, at this point, that there is possibly something a little wrong with Mr. Wells's logic. To say that because a World State is incompatible with national jealousy, with that atrocious Sinn-Fein spirit which the author identifies with European patriotism, that therefore the remedy for war is to establish a World State as soon as possible, would be like arguing that because football-playing is incompatible with physical debility therefore tubercular patients should play football. Practically Mr. Wells recognizes this; but the recognition takes away more perhaps than he realizes from the force of his plea for a World State. The whole problem, he admits, is one of intellectual and moral education.